

Story 1969 (1992 Tape 4)

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The Extent of Laz¹ Parallels

The mathematics instructor at Temel's² school was one day teaching a lesson in geometry. Taking a piece of chalk, he drew two parallel lines on the blackboard. He then asked the class, "How far will these two lines extend?"

The classroom suddenly became very noisy as students whispered back and forth to each other, each suggesting what he thought the correct answer was. When the teacher repeated the question, one student said, "Those two lines can extend to the end of the blackboard."

¹The word Laz referred originally to an ethnic minority living primarily in Trabzon and Rize provinces, along the extreme eastern part of the Turkish Black Sea coast. More recently the word has come to be applied to any resident of the entire Turkish Black Sea coast. In the Turkish oral tradition Laz people are stereotyped as being stupid or inept. This stereotype (like most others) is unjustifiable, for Lazes are, of course, much like other people.

²In tales about the stereotyped Laz as dummer or fool, the male characters usually have one or another of five or six very common Laz names. Temel is the name used most often, with Dursun in second place. Thus if either of these names occurs in a folktale, the audience knows at once that it is a Laz tale.

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Another student answered, "They could extend to the end of the earth." The teacher listened patiently as he awaited the correct answer.

Finally Temel stood up and said, "Teacher, we can extend those lines until the class bell rings."